



United States Navy Biography

Captain Michael R. Saunders, USN ***Deputy Commander, 33rd Operations Group***

Captain Michael R. Saunders was born in Warner Robins, Ga. and grew up in Omaha, Neb. He began his military career completing U.S. Air Force Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas and technical school at Chanute AFB, Ill. He served four years as an RF-4C flight simulator mechanic with the Nebraska Air National Guard and was honorably discharged as a buck sergeant (E-4) in 1984.

A 1985 graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Captain Saunders commissioned through Aviation Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Fla. and was designated a naval aviator in January 1988. Detailed as a Selectively Retained Graduate (SERGRAD) instructor pilot, he remained at Naval Air Station (NAS) Kingsville, Texas attached to VT-21 and TRAWING-2 flying the TA-4 Skyhawk. In March 1990, he transferred to VFA-125, NAS Lemoore, Calif., for training in the F/A-18 Hornet.



Captain Saunders reported to the VFA-25 "Fist of the Fleet" embarked in *USS INDEPENDENCE* (CV 62) and Carrier Air Wing-14 (CVW-14) during Operation DESERT SHIELD. He graduated from U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) and served as air-to-air training officer, nuclear safety officer and armament division officer.

Selected to participate in a Pilot Exchange Program with the U.S. Air Force, Captain Saunders reported to the 1st Fighter Squadron at Tyndall AFB, Fla., for training in the F-15C Eagle. In February 1994, he was assigned to the 12th Fighter Squadron at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, where he served the "Dirty Dozen" as the wing dissimilar air combat training officer, squadron activity security manager and chief, standardization and evaluation.

In November 1996, Captain Saunders returned to VFA-125 for re-training. He later reported to the VFA-146 "Blue Diamonds" and deployed in *USS NIMITZ* (CVN 68) with CVW-9 in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. He held department head positions of administrative officer, operations officer, and maintenance officer.

Following his Department Head tour in June 1999, he attended the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Ala. and Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Va. In October 2000, Captain Saunders reported to the Pentagon, Arlington, Va., as flag aide to the 31st Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

In March 2002, he was assigned to VFA-106, NAS Oceana, Va., for refresher training in the F/A-18. He reported to the *Bulls* of VFA-37 in September 2002 as the Executive Officer and took command in December 2004. Captain Saunders completed two deployments embarked in

(Current as of June 2010)

USS HARRY S TRUMAN (CVN 75) with CVW-3 to the Mediterranean Sea and Arabian Gulf and participated in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

In May 2005, he reported to Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC), NAS Fallon, Nev. Flying the F/A-18 and F-16 Fighting Falcon, Captain Saunders assumed duties to lead TOPGUN and Air Wing STRIKE training departments. He reported to U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), Offutt AFB, Neb. in July 2007 and served as Chief, Capability and Resource Analysis Division (J88); and Chief, Global ISR and Space Division (J84).

He reported to the 33rd Operations Group for standup of the F-35 Lightning II, Eglin AFB, Fla., in September 2009.

Captain Saunders' decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medals, Individual (w/combat V) and Strike/Flight Air Medals, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal and various unit and campaign decorations. He has accumulated over 4,000 flight hours and 500 arrested carrier landings.

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